

Comments on paper by Takahiro Kato ''Nino Compadrit''

著者	LISON-TOLOSANA C.
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Comments on paper by Takahiro KATO *Niño Compadrito*

C. LISÓN-TOLOSANA

Real Academia de Ciencias Morales y Políticas, Spain

Listening to Takahiro Kato's stimulating paper about *Niño compadrito* has caused me to relive my wanderings of many years ago around Cuzco and my participation in festivals endowed with an impenetrable air of opacity and mystery.

What I appreciate most in this essay is the anthropological approach to facts through fieldwork. Real actors, devotees, settings, spaces and times, the face of the *Niño*, the eyes of crystal, all aspects of factual existence, come before the essence and the '*quidditas*' that permits Kato to be reasoned with the facts of his experience, and to offer us phenomena backed up by solid evidence. Through his discreet indiscretion and continual dialogue with the informants, Kato stitches together material evidence, observed with a level of abstraction, because he places it within a cluster of kinship, god-parenthood and inheritance, all three of which form the structural basis of the *Niño compadrito*. He gives the form meaning, and then endows his reading with a moral vision. After all, facts are no absolute substitute for values, nor does material reality speak for itself.

Kato continues to process his facts. I find this very positive. Again and again, he submits facts to right and correct criticism, subjects them to empirical verification and, what is more important, he collects and analyzes differing, sometimes plural interpretations of what supposedly has happened. The mythic quality in this type of phenomena is fairly normal, but Kato's achievement is to show the correlation of popular interpretations with circumstantial strategies. As these change, Kato moves with them, following the compass of the passage of time, *rerum edax tempus*, to give us dynamic and changing structures imbued with the fluidity and indetermination of the belief itself, as well as the flexibility of its representations. I find the point he makes about generational changes excellent. Kato's descriptions, analysis, and interpretation are also well grounded.

If, on the other hand, this essay is to form part of a monograph about popular religiosity, permit me to suggest the following three points for further analysis.

In the first place, it would be worthwhile to re-clothe oneself a little more in the garb of the 'Other,' that is, to immerse oneself more deeply in empathy, so as to see the phenomenon of the *Niño compadrito* not only from the outside, but, rather, intimately, from within. Devotion, faith, and worship are not merely concepts, but also feelings,

passions, and beliefs that require deeper analysis of their interiority. Since doubt belongs to the very nature of belief, it might be convenient to analyze the dialectic between belief and doubt.

A second point which has not gained prominence in the presentation of this essay, and which seems important to emphasize, is the power of images. Several pages might be added about vitally important aspects of a large part of the Catholic liturgy, as well as of that in other religions, i.e. processions, paintings, sculptures, etc.

In the third place, in order to better understand the specificity of this phenomenon, it would be convenient to compare the phenomenon under discussion with similar phenomena in other parts of the world, for example the *corpos santos* (holy bodies) to be found in rural Galicia in the northwest of Spain. In this way, Prof. Kato would have ample material with which to gauge religious syncretism, as well as to differentiate between borrowed and autochthonous elements of Catholicism in its popular form, concepts with which this rich, imaginative, and dynamic essay already concludes very comprehensively and successfully.